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IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently amended) A method of retrieving an image from at least one of an information-storage medium and an information network, said method comprising:

a) setting a retrieval request containing a degree of importance for a plurality of keywords by assigning a degree of importance to each keyword ~~assigning a priority to a keyword, said keyword operative as a tag, which is tagged to an image~~;

b) calculating a necessity signal for an image based on the retrieval request and said plurality of keywords, each of said plurality of keywords being tagged to the image ~~a degree of importance for the image based on the priority assigned to the keyword~~; and

c) searching for the image from at least one of an information-storage medium and an information network and displaying the image, based on the necessity signal ~~the degree of importance of the image~~.

4. (Currently amended) An apparatus for retrieving an image from at least one of an information-storage medium and an information network, said apparatus comprising:

a) a menu entry section that allows an user to set a retrieval request containing a degree of importance for a plurality of keywords by assigning a degree of importance to each keyword ~~assign a priority to a keyword, said keyword operative as a tag, which is tagged to an image~~;

b) a retrieval section calculating a necessity signal based on the retrieval request and said plurality of keywords, each of said plurality of keywords being tagged to an image ~~degree of importance for the image based on the priority assigned to the keyword~~ and searching for the image from at least one of an information-storage medium and an information network based on the necessity signal ~~degree of importance of the image~~; and

c) a display section displaying the image output ~~outputted~~ from the retrieval section according to the necessity signal ~~degree of importance~~.

9. (Currently amended) The method for retrieving an image as defined in claim 7, wherein:

the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class is obtained depending on i) a first value having a larger value as a number of the tags tagged to the image increase, ii) a second value having a larger value as a number of the tags tagged to the image decrease, and

contributions of the first value and the second value to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class are determined by a number of non-zero components of a retrieval request signal by each class.

10. (Currently amended) The apparatus for retrieving an image as defined in claim 8, wherein:

the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class is obtained depending on i) a first value having a larger value as a number of the tags tagged to the image increase, ii) a second value having a larger value as a number of the tags tagged to the image decrease, and

contributions of the first value and the second value to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class are determined by a number of non-zero components of a retrieval request signal by each class.

11. (Currently amended) The method for retrieving an image as defined in claim 9, wherein:

when the number of the non-zero value is larger than a first predetermined value, the first value mainly contributes to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class;

when the number of the non-zero value is smaller than the first predetermined value, the second value mainly contributes to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class; and

which of the first value and the second value mainly contributes to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class changes with rapidity determined by a second predetermined value in a neighborhood of a point that the number of no-zero components equals the first value.

12. (Currently amended) The apparatus for retrieving an image as defined in claim 10, wherein:

when the number of the non-zero value is larger than a first predetermined value, the first value mainly contributes to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class;

when the number of the non-zero value is smaller than the first predetermined value, the second value mainly contributes to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class; and

which of the first value and the second value mainly contributes to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class changes with rapidity determined by a second predetermined value in a neighborhood of a point that the number of no-zero components equals the first value.